



Everything Michigan

Michigan law may relax firework restrictions; Saginaw fire chief in opposition

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By **Gus Burns | The Saginaw News**



Courtesy
Confiscated illegal fireworks sit in the Saginaw Fire Department's garage in this 2009 file photo. The state House recently approved a bill that would allow Michigan businesses to sell more powerful kinds of fireworks.

SAGINAW — Every year Stanley H. Quinn, 43, of Saginaw has his brother, who lives in Indiana, send him two boxes of fireworks.

They're buy one, get one free in Indiana, he said.

Quinn said he spends about \$100, which is absorbed into another state's economy.

Quinn likes the kind of fireworks that "go up in the air," he said, such as bottle rockets and Roman candles — fireworks that are illegal in Michigan.

Legislators don't expect a proposal to broaden Michigan's legal fireworks will pass by this Fourth of July, but by 2011, Quinn and other state residents who spend money across state lines on fireworks may be able to spend their money at home.

State House Bill 5999, known as the Fireworks Safety Act, passed the state House 79-28 on May 12; it would allow Michigan fireworks retailers to sell the same fireworks sold in neighboring states, including certain firecrackers, bottle rockets and Roman candles.

"It makes the same things that you can buy in Ohio, Wisconsin and Indiana legal in the state of Michigan," said state Rep. Harold L. Haugh, D-Roseville, who introduced the bill. "The Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin businesses obviously are opposed. They're indicating 75 percent of their sales, in some of the establishments around the border, come from the state of Michigan."

Presently, Michigan residents legally may purchase what Haugh calls "low-grade" fireworks, such as ground and hand-held sparklers, caps and noise makers.

The bill could be a moneymaker for the state, Haugh said.

He said a Senate committee will amend the bill and, if it is passed in the Senate, it will return to the House to be potentially voted into law. The present version of the bill proposes a 5 percent tax attached to the firework sales, and retailers would be required to pay \$5,000 initially and \$2,500 per year thereafter for licensing.

"A large amount of money, close to 50 percent, is being earmarked to supplement the Firefighters Training Fund, which was depleted in the last budget proposal," Haugh said.

Thomas Township Fire Chief Michael R. Cousins doesn't want to weigh in on the legislation until it's finalized and ready for a vote, but he said without additional funding, which the proposed law would provide, firefighter training costs to individual municipalities might double. A state fund that presently supplements training costs is dwindling, he said.

Saginaw Fire Chief E. Dean Holland says the money isn't worth the increased risk the fireworks would present to property and lives.

"I don't think the state needs to prostitute itself, and that's what it's doing," Holland said. "It's sad. It endangers the well-being of citizens of Michigan. They are opening the door to disaster."

Holland said throughout his fire career, he's "seen the personal injuries to children and the loss of life as a result of errant fireworks.

"I've seen homes totally destroyed because of illegal use of fireworks," he said.

Haugh said the increased risk doesn't trump the benefit of increased state revenue.

"These things are coming into the state now," Haugh said. "If somebody wants them, they'll go get them. I don't think there's going to be a huge increase in safety-related issues."

The fireworks are not inherently dangerous, the lawmaker said.

"It's the consumer, not the firework," Haugh said.

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